

Seven Flowers by Glitter_Bug

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Summary:

Collect seven different types of flowers from as many meadows. When going to bed, put the bouquet underneath your pillow. You will see your true love in your dream.

Billy always knew his Mom was a little different from other moms. Other moms knew all about things like how to get the grass stains out of white shirts or how to pack a lunch box so the juice carton didn't squash the fruit and the tomatoes in the sandwich didn't make the bread all soggy.

And other moms remembered to make brownies for the bake sales, and to send their kids in the right costumes for dress up days and to bring enough money to the store so they don't have to leave the candy behind.

But Billy didn't mind too much when his Mom didn't know about those things.

Because his mom knew all about magic.

OR

Billy remembers a Midsummer rite.

Seven Flowers

Author's Note:

- For [Ihni](#).

This fic is entirely devoted to Ihni and her delightful [Midsummer doodle](#) which inspired me!

Billy always knew his Mom was a little different from other moms. Other moms knew all about things like how to get the grass stains out of white shirts or how to pack a lunch box so the juice carton didn't squash the fruit and the tomatoes in the sandwich didn't make the bread all soggy.

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Because his mom knew all about magic.

She had a head full of rituals and rites from way way back, starting with some Swedish great-great-great-great-great grandmother and then handed down from mother to daughter for generations. Things like throwing a continuous strand of apple peel over your shoulder to reveal your lover's first initial or gazing into a candlelit bowl of water and waiting for a glimpse of the future.

And she knew really clever things too, like which flowers she could make into a tea to help Billy with his stomach aches, and which ones could be rubbed onto an arm to stop a bruise appearing.

But it was the Midsummer rituals that she held most dear. The ones about rolling naked in dew or tying coloured threads to sprouts of barley or running around a field at midnight with a four-leafed clover clutched to your breast.

None of it was very practical of course, in their shabby little house on the shabby little street, miles away from fields of wheat and with a husband who saw nothing charming or fun about a wife who slipped

away in the middle of the night in just a flimsy nightgown, but there was one she managed to get away with most years.

The gathering of flowers.

Collect seven different types of flowers from as many meadows. When going to bed, put the bouquet underneath your pillow. You will see your true love in your dream.

She'd explained it all to Billy one morning when he saw her arranging the crumpled, slightly squashed flowers into the old polka-dotted jug that stood in the kitchen windowsill. She told him all about the midsummer magic and the visions of your true love and Billy had been confused. Not about the magic- that all made sense- but about why she still did it. And so he'd asked her, with all the innocence of the young, "Isn't Daddy your true love?"

She'd sighed then, pausing as she gently nudged the dropping rose into place, and then she'd looked at him, a wistful look that didn't at all match up with her big smile, "Sometimes it's still nice to dream, baby."

The next year she took Billy with her.

They hadn't stuck to the rules, not exactly. Billy was pretty sure that their scrap of backyard didn't count as a meadow, and neither did the slightly less scrappy front yard owned by their neighbour and he was almost certain that the poppies from the side of the road probably shouldn't count either.

But his Mom reassured him that it was OK, that as long as he tried hard to think good thoughts before he went to sleep the magic would still work. And Billy found himself believing, eager to see what his dreams had in store for him. He even went to bed an hour earlier than his usual bedtime, running to his room as soon as they got in to tuck the flowers carefully under his pillow case before he lay down, still in his outdoor clothes and squeezed his eyes shut, willing sleep to come.

It wasn't easy. The roadside flowers had a weird chemical smell which made his nose hurt and there were still some prickly thorns on the rose and he couldn't help but think of the fact that Hogan, the

neighbour's sippy St Bernard, had almost certainly peed all over the lilacs, but Billy tried to ignore all of that and willed himself to think of only good things instead. Things like beaches and rock pools and apple pies with a drizzle of honey and picnics with his Mom and Dad and the time his third grade teacher had said he wrote the most engaging story about a surfing penguin that she had ever read and gave him two gold stars and a glow in the dark sticker.

And eventually Billy slept.

But he didn't dream.

Didn't get to see his true love.

Didn't wake with a vision in his mind and a smile on his face.

Instead he was woken abruptly, his heart hammering in fear as he was yanked up roughly by his arm to be faced with a furious Neil who'd followed a trail of muddy footprint to Billy's room and then found a parade of bugs that had been hiding in the flowers and had crawled out onto Billy's sheets in the middle of the night. And so instead of his flowers being arranged in his Mom's spotted jug, they were thrown unceremoniously into the trash, and instead of chatting eagerly about his dreams with his Mom over breakfast, Billy was made to go hungry as he stripped the sheets from his bed and cleaned his room from top to bottom, all the while ignoring the stinging tears in his eyes and the burning pain in his shoulder.

By the next Midsummer, Billy's Mom wasn't around anymore and Billy soon forgot the rituals. Not that it mattered. He didn't believe in magic anymore.

It's later, years later, when he's reminded of it again.

Almost a year after The MindFlayer, a year after Billy's entire life turned upside down. A year after everything changed.

Some of it for the better.

He's still stuck in Hawkins, courtesy of some government mandated bullshit, but they gave him enough hush money to make it out of Cherry Lane and Billy scored himself a sizeable trailer right on the outskirts of town, far enough from Neil for him to finally feel safe but

still close enough that Max was able to visit after school.

Max is one of the better changes. Maybe the best. Top two at least. They're closer now. Shared trauma and last-word apologies being more than enough to bridge a gap. And it's on one of her visits that Max stirs it all up.

Not that she means to. She's sitting on Billy's third-hand beaten-up couch while he cooks, droning on about a party the older kids at school are throwing that night, something called a 'Midsummer Mixer', which seemingly has absolutely nothing to do with the solstice and everything to do with finding an excuse to get drunk and have a party in a farmer's field, and angsting out loud about Lucas and the pretty girls at school who will definitely be there too and how she doesn't know if she should go. How she doesn't have the right look. How she doesn't fit in yet.

Teenage girl bullshit, really, Billy thinks. Shit she only thinks she needs to care about because she's started reading *Teen Beat* and *Seventeen* instead of comic books and skateboard mags.

But then he looks up from the sauce he's simmering on the stove and sees the real distress in her eyes. The sadness she's trying to mask with her moaning. So he turns the pan down, walking over to the back of the couch and ruffling a hand in her hair as she scowls and bats him away,

"Stop whining, shitbird. It's a party, yeah? Just a lame bonfire in a shitty field. It's not exactly the height of the Hawkins social scene."

And then he does his usual big brother warnings, wagging his finger as he imparts wisdom such as, '*beer before liquor, never been sicker*' before reeling off a load of exaggerated teen pregnancy horror stories, relishing the way that Max goes bright red and tries to cover her ears. He hams it up, his voice getting louder and louder over the sounds of her disgust, his hands catching her skinny wrists as she tries to clap a hand over his mouth or shut him up with a jab to his ticklish ribs.

Eventually Billy runs out of ways to embarrass her and Max runs out of energy, but she's finally smiling and the pan on the stove is

starting to bubble again, so they call a hasty truce.

Billy loads them both a plate of spaghetti and then, between shovelled mouthfuls, starts giving her some proper brotherly advice.

"Seriously Max, lame as you are, you're still a million times cooler than those stuck up bitches. But-" he pauses as he stands up, holding up one finger to get her to wait as he leaves the room, "If you wanna really show 'em-" he calls from the tiny bedroom in the back of the trailer, "then wear...this."

He comes out brandishing a denim jacket.

It's well-worn. Parts of it are faded and there's a hole starting to wear by the cuff, but the collection of band pins and patches give it an air of coolness that more than make up for its shabbiness.

"Wear this with that ratty green dress you got last week, and definitely wear your Chucks instead of trying to stagger around a field in dumb heels. Trust me-" he throws the jacket at her, hitting her smack in the face, "You'll look.... You'll be fine."

But he watches as Max just picks at her food, a furrow in her brow as she stares at the plate, so as soon as they've finished with dinner Billy forces her to stay in her chair so he can braid her hair, arranging it into a fancy, twirly crown around her head. He steps back to admire his handwork, reaching out to undo a few strands which fall artfully around her face, and then he nods, satisfied.

"Done. Now you gotta scoot, OK? Get home, get dressed and go have some actual proper fun for the first time in ever."

Billy walks her out with a few more half-joke warnings and a sincere promise to call him if she gets into any trouble at all. He's just about to close the door when he spots the little crop of stubborn daisies and Queen Anne's Lace that grows around his mailbox, and he calls Max back, getting her to sit on the wooden steps just outside his door as he carefully weaves a selection of the white flowers in and out of her braid.

"There y'go," he murmurs when he's done, "Proper May Queen now. Just don't mess 'em up when you put your dress on."

Max raises a tentative hand to touch the petals, and Billy instantly slaps it down, "What did I say?" he grumbles at her, "*Don't* mess 'em up. You'll never get it looking as good as I have."

Max grumbles back at him, but he can tell by her smile, and the way she keeps on checking her reflection in the trailer's windows that she's pleased. He lets her preen for a few minutes, then waves her away, "Get gone, shitbird. Try not to land on your head if you fall off your bike. Your ass is a softer landing anyway."

Max flips him the bird as she cycles away.
And then Billy's left alone.

And for the first time in years, he thinks about his old midsummers. The rituals. The rites. The flowers.

He knows now, from painful, first-hand experience, that monsters exist. And if nightmares can be real, why not dreams? Why not magic? Why not true love? And he has meadows now, a whole load of fields that surround his little house. He knows them well. He's walked the paths and navigated the trails and he's seen the flowers springing up. There's easily at least seven different types. And it is Midsummer Eve.

Billy's walking away from his trailer before he even realises. It's the perfect time of day, that point in a summer's evening when everything is tinged with a rosy hue and the searing heat of the day has softened into something pleasant and the breeze has started to stir.

So Billy walks. And he smiles.

When he reaches the first meadow he thinks about his Mom. He wonders if she ever did find the person she dreamed of. Someone who'd let her roll in the morning dew. Maybe even someone who'd roll with her. Billy lets himself imagine her, just for a moment, pictures her encouraging smile and tries to remember the exact scent of her jasmine perfume and the way her lips would feel on his forehead. And then, when the ache in his heart starts to feel like too much, he shakes the thought away and picks his first flower. A bright yellow daffodil.

And then he moves on. Moves to another field. Another flower.

And he finds himself thinking of another person entirely.

Harrington. Steve.

The first face he saw when he woke up in hospital.

Steve, with his long body sprawled out awkwardly on the rigid plastic seat, face crumpled against his palm and his hair mussed as he sat half dozing; sudden jolting upright when Billy started to speak, voice rusty and cracked as he croaked out, "You look like shit."

Steve whose big, brown eyes met his, full of exhaustion and now so much surprise. Whose lips parted in shock, just for a moment, then grew into a huge smile, the brightest greeting Billy had seen for a long time.

Who rolled his eyes and said, "Dude, seriously? First thing you say in three weeks and it's an insult?"

And who took Billy's hand and held on and didn't let go until Billy's sudden, silent tears had subsided.

Steve who had sat by his bed for hours and explained everything. Who came everyday bringing magazines and a Walkman and, on one occasion, some weird handheld game console that neither of them really knew how to play, but that Billy kept because it made Max green with envy whenever she saw it.

Steve who helped Billy to move what little he had left into the trailer, and then stayed because he had bet with Billy that *'none of the good pizza places will deliver all the way out here'* and who then insisted on crashing on the couch because he was *'far too tired to drive home now, Hargrove. I'm a danger to all the other road users.'*

Steve who was there, right there, when Billy woke up on his first night in an unfamiliar place with a scream in his throat and tears on his cheeks. Steve who whispered reassurances and held Billy until he calmed, and then made a joke about his morning breath *not being that horrifying, surely Hargrove*, as he flicked on the lamp and turned on the radio and filled the trailer with light and sound and chatter and jokes.

Steve who kept turning up to Billy's trailer with the Harrington's hand-me-downs like the television set that apparently didn't quite fit with Mrs. Harrington's living room decor and the thick, woolen

blankets that had started to make Mr. Harrington sneeze.

Steve who turned up on Halloween with horror films and candy, and on Thanksgiving with Tupperwares filled with leftovers and on Christmas with a boombox tied with a red ribbon and a bag filled with twenty individually wrapped tapes so that Billy would have '*a few more things to unwrap*'. Steve who seemed surprised when Billy handed his own little clumsily wrapped package, and then utterly delighted when he opened it to reveal the little plush rooster- a call back to some dumb in-joke that had sprung up between them.

Steve who also came over even when it *wasn't* a holiday.

Steve who kept coming round even when he didn't really have a reason to.

Steve who stuck around because he wanted to.

Billy walks over to the next meadow letting his fingers trail along the tops of bellflowers that had grown to reach his knees.

And he keeps thinking about Steve.

He thinks about his tiny moles peeking out from the collar of a polo shirt; he thinks about his warm chuckle that Billy knows how to turn into a gasping, snorting laugh; and the way he sings along to the radio when he drives them both to the lake and the fact that Steve always gives Billy the pickle from his burger without being asked.

Billy walks through more meadows. picks more flowers. Hunts out little irises and heady lavender and vivid marigolds and the pinkest of peonies and a delicate primrose.

And all the while he thinks of Steve.

It doesn't take him long before he's done. For all the openness of the meadows, Hawkins is still a small place, and Billy's back home just as the sun starts to set. He's yawning as he crosses the threshold, the walk and the bending over and the heat of the day have all taken it out of him. And maybe he's a little eager too, maybe there's still a part of him that's still an excited little boy. So Billy gently shakes the flowers out one by one over the bathroom sink, checking them carefully for bugs before he gathers them back into a bundle to lay under his pillow.

This time there are no prickly thorns to prick his skin, no chemical scents to catch in his throat, nothing but the sweet scent of the flowers and the bubble of excitement in Billy's chest.

He doesn't need to remind himself to think happy thoughts. Right now, they're the only kind on his mind.

And, for once, sleep comes easily.

He opens his eyes to find himself in the meadow again. Lying down this time, with a picnic blanket spread underneath him.

And Steve's smiling face above him, looking down.

"Hey there, sleepyhead."

Billy just blinks at him, and Steve smiles even more, "You're like a cat, sleeping in a sunbeam, 's cute." But then Steve's brow furrows a little and concern fills his tone, "Are you feeling OK? Not too tired? I know it's a bit of a walk to get here but I thought...worth it, y'know? Cause it's quiet and you hardly ever see anyone and the flowers are--"

"Steve," Billy cuts him off gently, "It's perfect, sweetheart." The endearment trips from his tongue before he can stop it, but it makes Steve smile instantly, his worry lines disappearing as his eyes crinkle instead.

"Well that's all good then. You deserve perfect, baby."

And then Steve's leaning forward. And Billy's closing his eyes.

But what he expects doesn't happen. Instead Steve leans past him, reaching out into the grass and pulling up a flower. A bright pink peony that he twirls in his fingers and then slips into Billy's hair, tucking the stem just behind Billy's ear and carefully arranging it until it's sitting just right.

He sits back and admires his handiwork, his thumb brushing against Billy's cheek as he cups Billy's face and gazes at him with something like wonderment.

"You look beautiful," he murmurs, and Billy can hear the sincerity in his voice. The weight of it.

And then Steve leans forward again. And this time he closes his eyes

too.

Billy wakes with a jolt. There's a tingle on his lips and his heart is hammering and his stomach is whirling madly.

But it's the good kind of whirling. The excited kind. Butterflies rather than tendrils.

He knows, without even glancing in the mirror, that he's woken up with a smile on his face. Big and bright and real.

He also knows that he shouldn't think too much of it. He's dreamt of Steve before, and not always innocently either, but the dream he just had feels like something more. Something deeper. Something special.

Magical.

Billy can't shake the images from the dream. He thinks about it as he goes to the bathroom and washes his face. He thinks about it as gets dressed. He thinks about it as he picks up the slightly crushed flowers from under his pillow, straightening them out and bundling them together to place in the chipped beer glass he found in his cabinet.

And then he has an idea.

He's in his truck, idling outside of Loch Nora before it hits him that he might be being dumb. But he can't turn back now. He won't. Instead he parks up a little way away from the houses and gathers up the flowers from the passenger seat, giving them a quick once over before he's springing out of the truck and walking a familiar route to a familiar house.

It's still early. There's still morning dew on the lawns and, save for a single, dedicated jogger, there's no one around. And Billy knows Steve's work schedule well enough to know that he'll almost certainly still be sleeping off the stresses of a late shift with Keith. But he's still cautious, still makes himself step quietly as he passes Beemer is parked neatly on the driveway and stands outside Steve's door.

He clutches the bouquet in his hand. Thinks for just a second before he's tugging the scrunchie from his hair- the skull-patterned one that Max bought him when she saw his hair creeping past his shoulders- and wrapping it securely around the stems of the flowers, tying them into a makeshift bouquet. It's not exactly luxurious, the flowers aren't exactly at their best after a night being flattened under Billy's pillow, and they could definitely do with some water to perk them up. But the red of the scrunchie adds an extra touch of brightness, and there's a certain rustic charm about the shabbiness of the blooms.

So Billy stops doubting them. Stops doubting himself.
He places the bouquet down on the doorstep.
And then, without a backwards glance, he walks away.

Half an hour later, there's a knock at Billy's door.
It's Steve. Standing there with the tiny bouquet in his hands and Billy's scrunchie wrapped around his wrist.

For a moment, neither of them say anything. And then Steve smiles. Smaller and shyer than Billy's ever seen him smile before. Bashful. Billy's almost expecting him to shove his hands in his pockets and start drawing circles in the dirt with his sneaker. Instead he turns the flowers over and over in his hands, looking down at them and then back up at Billy.

"No one's ever given me flowers before," he says.

Billy swallows the bubble of fear rising in his throat. Bites back all the words of denial and fake confusion despite the glaring red evidence wrapped around Steve wrist. Instead he raises an eyebrow, "Bit presumptuous, Harrington. Who says they're for you? Your Mom's a fine looking woman."

Steve laughs at that. Not the full on gaspy one, but not his polite chuckle either. Instead it's fond. Warm. Familiar. And he steps closer into Billy's space, "Not sure she's exactly your type though."

"Oh, I dunno," Billy grins back and licks his lips, trying to ignore the pounding of his heart as Steve's eyes flick down to follow the movement, "Good hair, brown eyes, nice ass and rich as fuck. Sounds

exactly my type."

"My mom's eyes are green," Steve says simply. And then he pauses, his eyes falling back to the flowers in his hand as he ducks his head and shuffles his feet.

And Billy's ready to bolt. To make some excuse and slam the door and slide down on the other side of it and bury his head in his hands and scream and cry and break things and drink and cry a bit more until he passes out.

But then Steve looks up at him. And he smiles again. A little bigger this time. Much less shy. He plucks a flower from the bouquet, the pink peony, and twirls it between his fingers for a moment before he threads it into the waves of Billy's hair, tucking it just behind his ear.

"Looks good. Really good," he murmurs, twisting a few of the curling strands around each other to hold the flower in place, and Billy's fingers thrill at the contact, at the way Steve's fingers tickle his scalp and on the sensitive shell of his ear.

And then Steve's hand slides to Billy's cheek, his thumb tracing the outline of Billy's face so gently. Reverently. Like Billy is something to treasure.

They stay like that for a moment, frozen, and then Steve steps forward, closing the few inches between them, and closes his eyes. So Billy closes his eyes too.

His heart hammers against his chest, and the butterflies in his stomach flutter again as Steve places his other hand on Billy's waist, the bouquet dangling from his fingers and brushing against Billy's hip.

There's another pause. Another moment.

And then Steve's lips meet his.

Billy's thundering heart soars as Steve's thumb strokes across his cheek and his fingers curl into Billy's hair and his tongue licks across Billy's lips and into his mouth and Billy can taste him, can taste his morning coffee and his toothpaste and a sweetness that is probably

just the very essence of Steve and Billy knows that he's falling into Steve, that he's leaning right into Steve's touch and his own hands are grasping, fingers fluttering at Steve's waist, almost afraid to hold on, to touch, in case it's too good to be true and he wakes up back in bed with seven flatted flowers underneath his head.

And Steve pulls back, just enough that he can gaze at Billy with an expression of pure happiness, grinning and glowing and looking so beautiful that Billy can't help but grin back. And as he does, he feels a bubble of utter joy rising from somewhere deep and long-forgotten.

And Billy believes in magic once more.